

# ALASKA BLUEBERRIES

Julie Cascio, Assistant Professor of Extension

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There are many species of blueberries in Alaska. All blueberries can be eaten fresh or used interchangeably in pies, muffins, puddings, jellies, jams and other recipes.

## Nutrition and Health

Blueberries are a rich source of antioxidants, a group of biochemicals shown to be an important part of the human diet. The oxygen radical absorption capacity test (ORAC) shows overall antioxidant activity. Original research with fruits show cultivated blueberries with a score of 24, which is higher than other commercial fruits included in the studies. Anything above 40 is considered very high.

*Wild Alaska blueberries score even higher:*

<b>Blue Huckleberry</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Dwarf Blueberry</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Bog Blueberry</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Alaska Blueberry</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Wild Blueberry (Lower 48)</b>	<b>61</b>

When berries are processed, antioxidant levels change but are still high compared to other fruits.

*Wild Alaska Blueberry products provide the following ORAC values:*

<b>Dried Berries</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>Canned Juice</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Fruit Leather</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>Canned Fruit</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Frozen Fruit</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>Jam</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Frozen Juice</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>Syrup</b>	<b>32</b>

## Cleaning and Storage

Spread a clean, dry terrycloth towel over a slanted surface, such as a cutting board with one end propped up a few inches above the other. Gently roll the berries down the towel; most of the debris and leaves will cling to the towel while the berries roll off.



Wild blueberries sometimes contain the immature or resting life stage of insects. Often affected berries are wrinkled or distorted. One option is to pick through and discard these berries. Another option is to make a brine solution of ½ teaspoon salt to 1-gallon tepid water. Add berries and let stand for one hour. The worms will escape from the berries into the water. Drain and rinse berries.

Clean blueberries may be stored in a covered container in the refrigerator. Berries will keep up to one week. Long-term storage methods include freezing and drying.



### Freezing

Arrange dry fresh berries on a cookie sheet in a single layer. Place the cookie sheet in the freezer. When frozen, transfer berries to freezer bags or containers. Seal and label. Properly frozen berries will last up to two years.

### Drying

*Sun* – Select firm, dry blueberries. Cover a flat tray with cheesecloth or light muslin. Spread the berries on the cloth; place tray in the sun. Dry in sun for 2 days turning once or twice. Then set tray in a warm, dry place and let blueberries stand until leathery to the touch.

*Oven* – Use a very low heat (140° F). The oven door must be left ajar so moisture can escape. Estimated drying time is 48–72 hours.

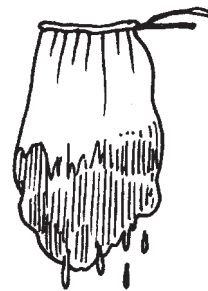
*Dehydrator* – Spread dry clean berries on open screen, following instructions that come with the dehydrator. Dry at 140° F. Estimated drying time is 24 to 36 hours.

Store dried, cooled berries in an airtight container in a cool, dry place. Use as you would raisins. Dried blueberries can be soaked in water for use in baking.



### Extracting Juice

Combine 11 cups of blueberries and 1 cup water. Crush berries. Bring just to a boil and simmer 10 minutes. Strain through jelly bag or in a colander through several layers of cheesecloth. Let juice drip into a bowl. For clear juice, do not twist or press jelly bag or cheesecloth. For long term storage, the juice should be canned or frozen. Yield: 5 ½ cups



*Hot pack for juice* – Sterilize canning jars. Heat juice, stirring occasionally until juice begins to boil. Pour into hot jars, leaving ¼ inch head space. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids. Process pints or quarts 5 minutes in a boiling water bath.

### Purée Preparation

*Cooked Method* – Add 1 cup water to 4 cups blueberries. Cook until skins have popped. Press through a food mill or sieve. Discard skins and seeds. Yield: 2 cups

*Uncooked Method* – Rinse 4 cups blueberries, drain, put in a blender and blend until the consistency of thick purée. Yield: 2 cups

For long term storage, the purée may be immediately dried as fruit leather or frozen. To freeze, pack purée into rigid containers leaving ½ inch head space to allow for expansion. Seal and freeze. **CANNING IS NOT A SAFE METHOD OF PRESERVING PURÉE.**

# RECIPES



## *Blueberry Applesauce Fruit Leather*

1 cup blueberry purée  
1 cup unsweetened applesauce  
1 tablespoon honey

*Oven dry* – Combine blueberry purée, applesauce and honey. Line a cookie sheet with microwaveable plastic wrap. Spread purée mixture evenly about  $\frac{1}{8}$  to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick over the plastic, but do not push it completely to the sides. Leave a bit of plastic showing for easy removal. Dry at 140° F for 10 to 18 hours, leaving oven door slightly open so moisture can escape. Test periodically for dryness. The fruit leather is dry when it is pliable and peels easily off the plastic.

*Dehydrator* – Lightly oil the plastic tray or spread the puree on parchment paper cut to fit the dryer racks. Do not push the puree completely to the sides. Dry at 140° F for about 8 hours until evenly dry. It should have a leathery texture. While warm, peel from plastic and roll. Allow to cool and rewrap the roll in plastic. Place the wrapped pieces in a heavy plastic bag or airtight storage container. Leather will keep up to one month in a cool, dry, dark place. For storage up to one year, place tightly wrapped rolls in the freezer.

## *Jams and Jellies*

### *Simple Blueberry Jelly*

5  $\frac{1}{2}$  cups blueberry juice  
5  $\frac{1}{2}$  cups sugar

Sterilize pint or half-pint canning jars for 10 minutes in boiling water. Prepare lids and bands. Combine ingredients; bring slowly to boiling, stirring occasionally until sugar dissolves. Boil rapidly, stirring frequently, until gelling point is reached—220° F on a candy thermometer. Pour jelly into hot jars, leaving  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch head space. Wipe jar rims and add prepared two-piece lids. Process 5 minutes in a boiling water bath. Yield: 7 cups

## ***Blueberry Jelly***

5 ½ cups blueberry juice  
7 cups sugar  
3 ounces liquid pectin

Sterilize pint or half-pint canning jars for 10 minutes in boiling water. Prepare lids and bands. Open pectin pouch and stand it upright in a cup or glass. Measure juice into a large saucepan. Stir in sugar. Place on high heat; stir constantly and bring to a full rolling boil that cannot be stirred down. Add the liquid pectin and heat again to a full rolling boil. Boil hard for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and quickly skim off foam. Immediately pour jelly into hot canning jars, leaving ¼ inch head space. Wipe jar rims and add prepared two-piece lids. Submerge the filled, closed jars under boiling water for 10 minutes. Remove from the water bath and let set on a rack for 12 hours. When cool, check seal, wipe jars, remove ring and store in a cool, dry, dark place. Yield: 8 cups

## ***Plain Blueberry Jam***

4 cups crushed blueberries (about 6 cups whole berries)  
2 tablespoons lemon juice  
1 package powdered pectin (1 ¾ ounces)  
4 cups sugar

Sterilize pint or half-pint canning jars and prepare lids. Measure sugar and set aside. Measure prepared fruit and lemon juice into a large saucepan. Add pectin and stir until dissolved. Bring to a full boil over high heat, stirring constantly. At once stir in sugar. Stir and bring to a full rolling boil that cannot be stirred down. Boil hard for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and quickly skim off foam. Pour jam into hot 8 ounce jam jars, leaving ¼ inch head space. Wipe jar rims and add prepared two-piece lids. Submerge the filled, closed jars under boiling water for 10 minutes. Remove from the water bath and let set on a rack for 12 hours. When cool, check seal, wipe jars, remove ring and store in a cool, dry, dark place. Yield: 5 cups

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### Sources:

*Antioxidants in Alaska Wild Berries*, P. Holloway, R. Dinstel and R. Leiner, Georgeson Botanical Notes No. 27, June 2006.

*Collecting and Using Alaska's Wild Berries*, S. Stanek and B. Butcher, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Alaska Fairbanks, FNH-00120, February 2003.

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*For more information contact Home Economist, Julie Cascio at  
907-745-3677 or [ffjmc2@uaf.edu](mailto:ffjmc2@uaf.edu).*

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